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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MARCH 09, 2009

Summary: National political stories on the current row between the ruling PPP and the main opposition party PML-N, and the possible coalition setup in Punjab, dominated headlines in all newspapers on Monday. Federal Minister Pervez Ashraf's statement announcing that the "time for reconciliation (with PML-N) was over" was highlighted by all major dailies. Newspapers reported that the "PPP and PML-Q have worked out modalities of power-sharing in Punjab" in case they succeed to muster up the required number of supporting members in the Punjab Assembly that are need to their government. Reports on killing of "14 kidnapped security men" by Taliban in Mohmand Agency received extensive display.

Most newspapers ran editorials on the security situation in the region with special reference to the peace in Swat and FATA. The leading Urdu daily, "Jang," advised the government to "deal effectively with all those elements who want to thwart the peace deal by resorting to continuous terror activities in other areas." The second-largest Urdu daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," noted that "had President Obama announced withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in his first presidential address, the foundation of permanent peace in the region would have been laid." Likewise, the Peshawar-based Urdu daily, "Mashriq," observed that "if the U.S. initiates dialogue with the moderate Taliban in Afghanistan to resolve the issue, it is for sure that situation will definitely improve." End Summary.

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News Stories  
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"PPP Launches All-Out Attack On PML-N; Time For Reconciliation Over: Pervez Ashraf" "Dawn" (03/09)

"Federal Minister for Water and Power Raja Pervez Ashraf launched a frontal attack on the PML-N leadership on Sunday and announced that the time for reconciliation was over. Addressing a news conference at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in his capacity as PPP's Deputy Secretary-General, he said the PPP would not remain quiet on the character assassination of President Asif Zardari."

"Power-Sharing, Formula 'Agreed'" "The Nation" (03/09)

"In anticipation of any future alliance between the PPP and the PML-Q, the two parties have reportedly worked out modalities of power-sharing in Punjab in case they succeed to muster up support of required number of Punjab Assembly members to form their Government."

"No Objection To Peaceful Long March" "The Nation" (03/09)

"Terming peaceful demonstration and rallies as democratic right of every person, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on Sunday said that the government had no objection to the proposed long march of the lawyers if it would be peaceful and within the ambit of law."

"March To Be Stopped Outside Capital" "Dawn" (03/09)

"The government finalized on Sunday its plan to seal Islamabad and bar the lawyers-led long march from proceeding towards the Parliament House, but decided to show some flexibility by offering two alternative venues if the march remained peaceful."

"14 Kidnapped Security Men Found Murdered" "Dawn" (03/09)

"Security forces claimed killing 15 militants after the bodies of 14 Khasadar men were found on Sunday. Some of the Khasadar men had been kidnapped on Saturday night after their convoy was ambushed in Mohmand tribal region."

"U.S. For Multifaceted Effort To Stabilize Pakistan; Obama To Work With Islamabad To Eliminate Safe Havens" "The Nation" (03/09)

"US President Barack Obama has pledged to work closely with Pakistan's government to eliminate militant safe havens along its Afghan border. 'At the heart of a new Afghanistan policy is going to be a smarter Pakistan policy,' Obama said in an interview published in the Sunday edition of The New York Times."

"Obama Hints At Talks With Afghan Taliban" "Dawn" (03/09)

"President Barack Obama opened the door to a reconciliation process in which the American military would reach out to elements of Taliban in Afghanistan like it did to Sunni militants in Iraq, the New York Times said in a report based on exclusive interview with the President...."

"New U.S. Afghan Policy Next Month" "The News" (03/09)

"New U.S. Afghan policy would be announced within three weeks as new U.S. administration is favorably disposed towards reconciliation course in international disputes. This was revealed by the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Ms. Anne W. Patterson in an exclusive chat with 'The News' at the Prime Minister Secretariat on Sunday, where she had turned up to attend the National Convention on International Day of Women."

"World Concern About Pak Situation Grows" "The News" (03/09)

"U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne W. Patterson has arrived in Islamabad from her capital after having extensive consultations with the senior officials, and she is commencing meetings with stalwarts of the political divide in Pakistan from today (Monday). The U.S. Ambassador had initial meetings with the Foreign Office high ups for making an assessment of the situation."

"LeT Now Biggest threat To U.S.: Report" "Dawn" (03/09)

"The next major attack on the U.S. soil may come from militants associated with Lashkar-e-Taiba and not Al Qaeda, say American terrorism experts. Juan Zarate, the Deputy National Security Advisor for counter-terrorism in the Bush administration, told the Chicago Tribune that even before the Mumbai terrorist attacks last November, the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies were focusing on LeT as the next big threat to U.S. Security."

"Sufi Asks Militants To End Blockades" "The News" (03/09)

"TNSM Chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad, along with a large number of his black-turbaned activists, forced the Taliban fighters on Sunday to end their blockade of the Takhtaband Road and open the bypass for traffic on a day when a convoy of the security forces carrying ration came under attack in a village known as militants' stronghold in Swat."

"Swat Taliban Agree To Remove Check-Posts" "Daily Times" (03/09)

"The Taliban on Sunday agreed to remove all check-posts across Swat

district following the successful completion of talks between the NWFP government, the banned Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) and the defunct Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a private TV channel reported."

"Taliban Warn Government Against Issuing NICs To Women" "The Nation" (03/09)

"The Pakistani Taliban in the troubled Khyber Agency have warned authorities not to issue national identity cards to women, saying the practice is 'un-Islamic.'"

"Indian Surgical Strikes May Spark War: Musharraf" "The News" (03/09)

"Former President Pervez Musharraf has cautioned war can erupt if India resorts to surgical strike. He said this in his interview with a private TV channel in New Delhi on Sunday."

"Mumbai Attack Suspects - Interpol Chief Asks India To Provide DNA Profiles" "Dawn" (03/09)

"Interpol has asked India to provide DNA profile of terrorists involved in the Mumbai attacks, including Ajmal Kasab so that their international links may be ascertained, while addressing a press conference in Islamabad on Sunday, Interpol's Secretary General Ronald K. Noble said."

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Editorials/Op-eds  
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"Swat Peace Deal - An Encouraging Development," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (03/09)

"The successful progress on the deal between the NWFP government and the TSNM in Swat is encouraging on the one hand, but the bomb blasts in Peshawar, Darra Adamkhel and Khyber Agency that resulted in death of 17 people including eight personnel show alarming situation in other parts of the NWFP too. It is imperative for the government to deal effectively with all those elements who want to thwart the peace deal by resorting to continuous terror activities in other areas."

"Obama's Positive Approach," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/09)

"President Barack Obama has said that America is not winning the war in Afghanistan, which is why talks could be held with moderate Taliban. According to him, the Taliban gained strength in the last two years while the Karzai government could not win the confidence of Afghans.... Had President Obama announced withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in his first presidential address, the foundation of permanent peace in the region would have been laid. Now that he has realized the importance of dialogue with moderate Taliban, he should frame his new Pakistan, Afghanistan policy in keeping with this realization."

"Positive Approach Of President Obama," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (03/09)

"President Barack Obama has admitted that the Afghan war cannot be won, and the fighting in Iraq is a good example of this fact. If the U.S. initiates dialogue with the moderate Taliban in Afghanistan to resolve this issue, it is for sure that situation will definitely improve there. However, a favorable atmosphere must be created to achieve something before kicking off the dialogue process."

"A Common Threat," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (03/09)

"The battle to purge Pakistan's tribal areas of foreign militants has not only gathered momentum; the induction of tribesmen is also proving helpful in isolating militants in the area. The continuation of talks is the only solution to this sensitive issue. The monster of terrorism is not only engulfing Pakistan and

Afghanistan, but the whole world. It is the responsibility of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the U.S. to collectively fight this common enemy."

"Progress For Peace In Swat," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (03/09)

"This is good news that talks between the Frontier government and TNSM succeeded as a result of which 12 Taliban prisoners were released.... In order to achieve peace in Swat the people of the region should be assured that rebellion is not the way to get their demands accepted. They should be told that peaceful political struggle could yield positive outcome."

"Another Few Funerals," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/09)

"Our leaders continue to insist we are winning the war on terror. But there is little real evidence of this. The fact is that the terrorists have succeeded in changing countless aspects of life across our cities and towns. This, for them, is an immense victory. It is obvious they are now in control of many areas of the Frontier. The terrorists wish to take over our country and our lives. The war on terror is not one that the authorities can win alone. New tactics are needed and these can be devised only with the fuller involvement of people."

"Downing Of The Drone," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (03/09)

"Though such planes fly at a height beyond the range of small arms yet if it was shot down, it was the result of hatred of the local people who lost their near and dear ones by such drones attacks.... Though downing or crashing of the spy plane will be of no value to the super power in financial terms a clear message lies for the U.S. to reconsider its policy, share intelligence and let Pakistani forces fight them out."

"Now They Are Targeting Pakistan," an op-ed by Dr. Samiullah Koreshi in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (03/09)

"Her (Lady Clinton) proposal was 'to call a high level international conference on Afghanistan to be sponsored by the United Nations and attended by wide range of countries including Pakistan and possibly Iran.' This proposal is aimed at targeting Pakistan as an international culprit and as a patron of the terrorists. This is a double-edged proposal.... If this is so, Pakistan should keep itself away from the proposed conference and be vigilant about its independence and sovereignty if these words convey any sense to the powers that be in Pakistan."

"Peering Into Pakistan's Predicament," an op-ed by Dr. S.M. Rahman in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/09)

"The United States urgently needs a new strategy. Washington must get over the idea that it can and should micromanage political outcomes in countries like Pakistan. Trying to produce governments that both uncritically accept all U.S. security requests and also pass our democracy litmus test is hopeless given the fact that the overwhelming majority of voters in Pakistan are hostile to U.S. strategy in the region."

"How We Lost Swat," an op-ed by Nasir Abbas Mirza in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/09)

"We lost Swat the day we made discriminatory laws based on sectarian and religious divisions.... We lost our way when we set up parallel systems with all kinds of Islamic councils and courts.... The loss of Swat is not the end of it. It is just another battle lost by us. This battle, and the many more to come, can only be won with more liberties, more freedom and more rights. And a state with a will to protect these at all costs. That's the real battlefront of this war against terror and extremism."

"Reviving the Peace Process," an op-ed by Talat Masood in the

centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/09)

"The terrorist attack in Lahore on the Sri Lankan team once again exposed the weakness of the Pakistani state. The ease with which the terrorists committed the crime and melted away in the population reaffirms the international concern that Pakistan is a safe haven and a victim of terrorism. It is apparent that terrorist network and infrastructure has expanded in every province and that these elements have evolved over time in shifting political environments. It is not only confined to FATA, NWFP and Baluchistan but has crept into Punjab and other parts of the country. The Lahore incident also demonstrates that radicalism is moving eastward at a fast pace.... War on terror climate has given terrorists an unwanted leverage. "

"Clutching At Staws," an op-ed by Shaheen Ali in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/09)

"Words alone will not distance the federal government from a deal with non-state actors on Pakistani territory. At the end of the day, the buck stops with the federal government. Hoping that these Pakhtuns in the back of beyond can take all the 'blame' will simply not work. We cannot have our cake and eat it; we either have an honest peace accord and give it our best or we don't. Delaying tactics in signing the Nizam-i-Adl regulation 2009 will not absolve the federal government. It will only make matters worse."

"Kidnapping As A Political Tool," an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (03/09)

"Nothing exposes the absurdity of our political culture as succinctly as the kidnapping of foreign guest workers on the Pakistani soil to settle scores or extract concessions otherwise denied by the government. So it shocked every thinking person when the heretofore unknown Baloch Liberation United Front (BLUF) kidnapped John Solecki... But equally shocking, perhaps more, was the kidnappers' demand which revealed the bizarre dimensions of high-handedness to which the people of Balochistan have been subjected by the state.... His kidnappers should realize that keeping him incarcerated is an insult to the human cause he is engaged in, as representative of the UN refugee agency. It is for their own good that they should not cross the red line that separates a just struggle for rights from terrorism."

"Kashmir Dispute And Pervez Musharraf's Confused Thoughts," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/09)

"Former president General (retired) Pervez Musharraf has suggested elimination of the Line of Control in Kashmir followed by more autonomy to Kashmiris. He made the remarks addressing a seminar in New Delhi.... Instead of presenting a national standpoint on disputes between Pakistan and India, Musharraf went for statements that will increase Kashmiris' disappointments and might be welcomed in India.... The government of Pakistan should ask Musharraf to avoid giving statements on Pakistan-India disputes without proper permission and briefing by the Foreign Ministry."

"LoC Is Not Berlin Wall!," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/09)

"Lest there should be any doubt about the crying need for the two nations (India and Pakistan) to resolve old contentious issues to end mutual acrimony and forge reconciliation in the interest of a surer and more prosperous life for nearly 1.25 billion people, it must be stated that unless the spirit of justice rules in the settlement of these disputes, the precondition of durable peace for ending the Subcontinent's problems, would not have been met." Patterson